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Polk Audio LC265i-IP In-Wall Loudspeakers Reviewed

Nearly everybody has in-wall speakers but few have wireless, IP controlled speakers but that is what Polk Audio has for you and your home theater or home automation system. Read the full review from HomeTheaterReview.com here.



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Reviewed

BY AUTHOR: HOME THEATER REVIEW

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In-wall speakers are nothing new, with nearly every speaker manufacturer offering a line or two of in-wall products. However, not many (if any) of them are wireless and feature Internet connectivity. Well, that's the case with the **Polk Audio** LC265i-IP speakers, the worlds' first active Internet Protocol-ready in-wall loudspeakers. What does all this mean? For starters, the LC265i-IP uses integrated digital amplifiers, negating the need for outboard amplification and speaker cables. The LC265i-IP also features built-in DSP or digital signal processing, with room correction that allows the user to essentially tune each LC265i-IP to the environment at the speaker, rather than at the processor or receiver, which is more standard. This is all accomplished through a USB connection to your computer or laptop via a port on the front baffle of the LC265i-IP itself. Sounds pretty good, and it should. However, there is a lot of fine print. Are the LC265i-IPs, at \$2,900 per pair, worth it? You be the judge.



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Aside from the technical wizardry, the LC265i-IP is more or less a traditional two-and-a-half-way in-wall speaker. The LC265i-IP features a one-inch tweeter sandwiched between a single six-and-a-half-inch midrange driver and a six-and-a-half-inch bass (**Polk** calls it a subwoofer) driver. The LC265i-IP has a reported frequency response of 20Hz-27kHz. Since the LC265i-IP is powered, there is no sensitivity rating or ohm listing. However, the internal digital amps churn out a total of 200 watts, which are broken down between the individual drivers: 100 watts for the woofer, 75 watts to the midrange and 25 watts to the tweeter. The LC265i-IP's internal amplifier is powered by a 48-volt DC local power supply, which sadly is not included with the product.

The LC265i-IP is designed to integrate into a StreamNet IP-based whole home automation system, but it can also be connected to a traditional analog-based system. The beauty of being able to integrate the LC265i-IP into a more traditional home automation system is two-fold; it opens up the LC265i-IP to older systems or smart homes and doesn't eliminate the LC265i-IP's onboard DSP, which is accessed through a front-mounted USB port next to the LC265i-IP's tweeter.

Read about the high points and the low points of the LC265i-IP on Page 2.

High Points

- Beyond the technical data and "world's first" titles, the LC265i-IP sounds damn good and demonstrates that Polk, despite the technology, maintained a proper focus on musicality and natural sound reproduction.
- The LC265i-IP's midrange is smooth and rich, while the bass is taut and articulate and goes surprisingly deep for an in-wall loudspeaker.
- The LC265i-IP's high-frequency performance is solid, possessing a sweetness and composure not usually associated with in-wall loudspeakers.
- The LC265i-IP's are a custom installer's dream come true and the benefit of keeping the signal digital all the way to the loudspeaker results in cleaner, less distorted sound. However, the ability to integrate the LC265i-IPs into an analog distribution system is an added plus.
- If you have an IP audio distribution system in your home or are thinking about adding one, the LC265i-IPs are a high-end solution that will fit the bill nicely.



Low Points

- The LC265i-IPs mount in the walls much like any other in-wall loudspeakers do. However, connecting them to your system is a bit more complex and should be done by a custom installer, which is going to add to the cost of ownership.
- I think the LC265i-IP is fairly priced. However, the retail price doesn't include all the necessary gear to get the LC265i-IP up and running. You have to figure in a 48V DC power supply, SPS-I power supply and even a mounting bracket (optional), which can add as much as a \$1,000 to the overall package.
- The LC265i-IPs are truly designed and marketed towards whole home automation systems, which is something of a shame, for the idea of a wireless home theater is kind of cool. In terms of whole home audio, the LC265i-IP is quite good.

Conclusion

Whole home automation systems are a hot commodity, though sales and installations have slowed as of late, due to the current slump in the housing market. Putting that aside, those consumers with IP home automation systems in need of quality in-wall loudspeakers should look no further than Polk Audio's LC265i-IP. While not the easiest speakers to understand on paper, rest assured that your installer will view them as a godsend and, once installed, you'll reap the benefits. While the LC265i-IP's retail price doesn't represent the total cost of ownership, if you're looking to build or complete a state of the art IP-based home automation system, the Polk Audio LC265i-IP should be the first speaker on your audition list.